

DATE: April 15, 1977

TO : File

FROM : J.L.

SUBJECT: conversation with Norton Zinder in re. Elsie Bergland

Norton just called me to record the very sad story of Ed Tatum's last days. In the fall of 1974, one of Ed's relatives (an uncle?) wrote him that he or she had recently met Elsie Bergland who was then a librarian at Colorado State University at Fort Collins, Colorado. Evidently Elsie and Ed had been college sweethearts at Wisconsin; he had proposed to her then; she had wanted first to try to make her own way in a career in library science, and had turned him down. This was six months before Ed married June Alton. As far as can be said, they had had no contact during all those years. But when Ed decided to go to Arizona for his health late in '74, he wrote to her and asked her to join him, which she did. Apparently they were able to rekindle their former relationship, in part because Ed was able to conceal just how sick he was, and they came back to New York to be married approximately March 1975. Norton and Marilyn, who were among Ed's closest friends at the time, were quite alarmed at the implications of this marriage and correctly so in view of subsequent events.

Ed and Elsie were evidently married very quietly, perhaps even by proxy for health reasons. That summer Ed insisted, against the advice of all of his friends, in undertaking a trip to Europe that included the Bernadotte - organized meeting of Nobel laureates. He took sick while traveling and returned, necessarily by boat, to get an obvious diagnosis of congestive heart failure and pulmonary edema.

He had a protracted course in the hospital, during the course of which he was evidently so hypoxic that he hallucinated, became paranoid, was so abusive to Elsie that she had little choice but to leave. He hardly recognized anyone. Norton and Marilyn were apparently the only people in whom he was able to confide at all. He had delusions about invasions from Mars and similar matters that he would repeatedly call Norton in the middle of the night for reassurance or help or whatever, and it was altogether a very hard time on those who did continue to associate with him. There was not much more they could do for him in the hospital, so this process continued when he returned to his furnished apartment which was right next to the Zinders.

As far as is known, Bergland is back in Colorado, has been in some written communication with Norton and Marilyn, but we agreed that there would be little purpose in reopening a necessarily very painful wound. So it is clear that this story instructs what should not be as much as what should be said about that aspect of his life.